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I
Pioneering

CHAPTER 1

An Idea Takes Root

THE TRAIN whistle sounded at Canoe Lake, and excitement ran high at Tanamakoon. The counsellors had donned their fresh green camp suits, the canoeing counsellors had gone to Algonquin Park Station to meet the campers, to get the non-paddlers and paddlers separated and into canoes or motorboats. The rest of the counsellors waited on the dock. Already the campers' baggage was in place. The counsellors of the younger group had unpacked the dunnage bags and made ready their beds, and on each bed there was placed a teddy or favoured animal from home.

As the counsellors waited on the dock, they talked of those touching treasures, and tried to picture the owners who were to be their special responsibility for the summer; but here they were. It seemed no time at all after the train whistle, before the motorboats came spinning up the narrows with the first load of younger campers. Then followed a flotilla of thirty canoes with three campers in each canoe.

Tan suits topped with eager faces swarmed all over the dock. Almost before we could welcome them they were off in every direction, seeing what was new and what

changes had been made, or showing new campers around the premises. Tanamakoon lost its air of a deserted village and the whole place became alive; the summer for which we had planned for months had begun, another summer in Algonquin.

To the uninitiated the name of Algonquin spells Indian. One thinks of wise men of the forest who knew this country well and trapped and fished here in the days when all the wilderness of forest and stream belonged to them. These associations are true, but Algonquin Park is much more than an Indian hunting ground. It is an expanse of twenty-seven hundred square miles of forest interlaced with fifteen hundred lakes and connecting rivers and streams. It is a land that finds a place in history associated with the records of Champlain and a place in art associated with the names of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven. In the days of Champlain, it was the happy hunting ground of the Algonquin Indians, who came in quest of furs, and from whom Algonquin Park got its name. In the days of Tom Thomson it became the gathering place for members of the Group of Seven, artists who established a new trend in Canadian painting.

About the middle of the nineteenth century the lumber operators came and cut the white pine, and the streams echoed to the cries of the river drivers. Then a thoughtful official in the Department of Lands and Forests, Alexander Kirkwood, saw the need to protect the natural forest, to guard the head waters of our rivers, and to make a sanctuary for the wild life. So in 1893 the Algonquin Provincial Park Act was passed by the Ontario Legislature to free this land from exploitation and set it aside as a permanent game and forest preserve for the use and enjoyment of the people.

Hence it is that the deer eat from one's hands and that birds of countless kinds may be seen by bird lovers, for

today no man may carry a gun into the Park that the ranger has not sealed, and that seal may not be broken until the owner leaves.

The wild life of Algonquin is a constant surprise and delight. A doe may be seen with tiny fawns in tow, or a bear may come lumbering down to the water's edge for a drink. Here a beaver is busily engaged in building his dam, or a flock of wild ducks take to flight at our approach. A pileated woodpecker hammers at a nearby tree, and from across the lake comes the lonely call of a loon.

These are only a few of the delights of the Park. It is a land of sheer magic tranquillity and unspoiled beauty of lakes and pines, which once experienced is unforgettable and always loved.

It was in this Indian country, in 1925, that the "biography" of Tanamakoon had its beginning.

Camping as an organized, co-operative way of living is a comparatively recent movement, which was born in the United States in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

In Canada, though a few organizational camps were scattered through the country at that time, privately organized or owned camps were almost non-existent. It was not till after World War I that they made noticeable headway.

Up to and during that time, I was teaching Physical Education in various schools and colleges in Toronto, mainly at the Margaret Eaton School. This school was primarily engaged in training teachers of Literature, Dramatic Art and Physical Education. It had been established by the late Timothy Eaton and named in honour of his wife, Margaret Eaton. The principal was Mrs. Scott Raff, who later became Mrs. George Nasmith. Some estimate of Mrs. Nasmith's exceptional contribution to education in Canada will find its place later in this story.

Because of the rapidly increasing interest in Physical Education and the demand for teachers, this department of the school, as time passed, played a more and more prominent part. The staff grew apace. As director of the department, I had spent my vacations each year at summer schools in quest of the latest trends. If it was not Harvard, it was Chatauqua or New York, or perhaps England at Stratford or Cheltenham, where I found Cecil Sharp and his work on the English Folk Dance particularly fascinating.

Up to this time the thought that Physical Education should include in its programme camp training had not presented itself to me. It was, however, becoming increasingly evident at the Physical Education Conferences in the United States that summer camps had come to stay and that schools of Physical Education would have their part to play in the training of counsellors.

Gradually I began to realize the advantage it would be to our students of Physical Education if a camp were made available to them for the month of September, for already they were taking their place as counsellors in the existing organizational and private camps with insufficient background. To have a place where they could go for counsellor training, learn the theory of camping skills and put it into practice on the spot, seemed not only right but necessary. Along with this thought grew the idea of a summer camp for children and teen-age girls. I knew little of camping and nothing of directing the building of a camp, but I knew girls, big and little, or thought I did, for I had been living in school and college residences all my teaching days.

The idea became more and more intriguing, and after spending a few weeks at the Sargent School camp near Boston, and seeing other camps in action in the United States and Canada, I decided to do something about it.

Thinking that Algonquin Park was much too wild and remote for a girls' camp, I considered sites on Georgian Bay and in Muskoka, but none of these seemed quite adequate.

There were two definite objectives to be considered: A site suitable for a summer camp for children, and at the same time one which could be used as a training centre for the Physical Education students of the Margaret Eaton School, always provided I was given permission to take them there. With these objectives in mind, Norah MacLennan, a Margaret Eaton School graduate, and I set out in August, 1924, to explore the possibilities of Algonquin.



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